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ABSTRACT

This study developed and tested a model for using peer coaching to improve college instruction of culturally diverse students. The model's four elements include: change based on collegial relationships combined with peer interactions; dealing with classroom problems through positive behavior change of professors; presentation of observation results by peer mentors in a way that will allow faculty members to accept them as valid, internalize them, and use them to identify needed changes in a risk-free atmosphere; and teacher change through group efforts which are given perceivable prestige or tangible reward by administrators. Twelve tenured faculty members taught college classes to primarily Hispanic and Black students in factory or community settings. Faculty were trained in specific techniques for improving classroom teaching, such as questioning strategies, discussion strategies, student mediating of ideas, setting of expectations, lesson pacing, wait times, and content densities of lessons. Peer dyads observed each other's classes and discussed strategies for improvement; the project director met with each dyad biweekly, and the entire group also met biweekly. At the end of the semester, the faculty were more positive about their ability to teach nontraditional student populations and were more positive that high expectations could be set and gained for them. Professors showed an increasing use of a variety of teaching techniques. (Contains 44 references.) (JDD)

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USING FACULTY PEERS TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION IN DIVERSIFIED COLLEGE CLASSROOMS

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BACKGROUND, SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE

Students in our nation's colleges are substantially different from those two decades ago. Many colleges and universities have experienced a dramatic shift in their ethnic and gender enrollment patterns. An example from the Los Angeles City College is indicative of the changes occurring in many other colleges. From 1929 through 1951 the student body at Los Angeles City College was 100 per cent white; in 1972 the population was 38.2 per cent white, 32 per cent black, 14.5 per cent Hispanic and 11.6 per cent Asian. By 1986 the population had changed again, to 29.4 per cent Hispanic, 26.4 per cent Asian, 20.3 per cent white, and 19.5 per cent black.

Minority students accounted for 11 per cent of all university enrollments in 1988. The 1993 Almanac Issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education reported that minority students make up 21.2 per cent of the total enrollment at our nation's institutions of higher learning. Of these students, 9 per cent are black; 6 per cent are Hispanic; 4 per cent are Asian; and .8 per cent are American Indian. In addition, these students are enrolled in all types of educational institutions with 19.3 per cent enrolled at public 4-year institutions; 24.6 per cent enrolled at public 2-year institutions; 17.7 per cent enrolled at private 4-year institutions; and 28.5 per cent enrolled at private two year institutions.

College and university student bodies are also becoming more diverse in other ways. In 1993 full-time students made up only 56.5 per cent of the student's population; thus almost 44 per cent of today's college and university students have full or part time jobs. Many are married and have children. Today's student population is divided rather equally between men and women--with women making up 54.7 per cent of college enrollments.

Today's college students are also generally older than their counterparts of past years. In 1940 only 4.6 per cent of adults age 25 and older received bachelor's degrees. In 1990, 24 per cent of students receiving bachelor's degrees were over 25. These older students are predominantly women. The under age 25 female enrollment grew 70 per cent from 1970 to 1985 while the over age 25 group jumped 300 per cent from 879,000 to 2,895,000. The over age 25 group now comprises 45 per cent of the female collegiate enrollment (National Center on Education Statistics, US Dept. of Education, 1993).

What we must teach is also different. The student today is confronted with a different learning menu. The fund of knowledge is doubling every three years; the requirement for higher order thinking skills has never been greater; the focus on life-long learning is permanent, and the need for teaching human relations has never been greater (Pickens, 1990).

Yet studies show that we are, for the most part, teaching these students with the same faculty that we were using 15 years ago. The graying of the college faculties across America is obvious. According to statistics from the National Center on Education, (1992), forty six per cent of all college and university faculty are 50 years of age or older, and 76 per cent are male.

If this is not a crisis in numbers, it is surely a crisis in terms of distribution of ethnicity and gender of faculty. Professors need to develop new strategies for teaching the culturally diverse students who are now in their classrooms. These are students who may learn differently or come from vastly different experiential backgrounds than the faculty who are charged with teaching them. Methods which worked before with students who were

predominantly young and culturally similar will have to change if we are to continue to reach the wide spectrum of students who fill the classes of the 90's and beyond.

While it is clear that instruction and instructors must change to meet the needs of this new and diverse student body, changing teaching habits and attitudes remains a difficult and arduous task. Many stop gap methods have been tried to change instruction in well established faculty ranks. Often programs designed to help college and university faculty improve teaching for diversity consist of nothing more than "awareness sessions" which introduce faculty to the diversity of the needs of the students whom they teach. While these types of sessions are certainly helpful, the research on teacher change indicates that this type of superficial training translates into little or no change in instructional methods and strategies. An extensive study of teacher learning at Michigan State University (Floden & McDiarmid, 1993) showed that merely giving teachers knowledge about the cultures of various groups did not enhance teachers' abilities to teach students from these groups. Indeed, some teachers became even more convinced that students from these groups would have more difficulties learning.

However, it is our premise that significant changes in teaching behaviors can occur if careful peer coaching programs are established to help faculty change both teaching attitudes and teaching behaviors. Research into peer coaching for elementary and secondary teachers has shown that classroom behavior can change when peers work together (Lanier, 1978; Kurth, 1988). Thus, the purpose of this research was to develop and test a model for using peer coaching to achieve actual change in educational strategies for teaching the culturally

diverse students in college and university classrooms. The goal of this peer coaching was the improvement of instruction.

We are proposing a model for peer coaching which has actual positive changes in teaching behavior as a primary goal. We realize that changes in actual classroom behaviors are difficult to achieve among established faculty--yet we posit that the needs of diverse students can be met in no other way--except through actual change in instructional behaviors. We also believe that instructional change is a gradual process which does not occur overnight and which comes out of changing awareness on the part of the instructor and that education is a social activity in which changes in attitudes and behaviors occur through interactions with others.

The model (adapted from concepts found in the Boyan and Copeland supervision model) details four elements for successful peer faculty interactions to promote instructional change. First, it emphasizes a model of instructional change based on collegial relationships combined with peer interactions rather than supervisory evaluation. The value of a staff development model predicated on the idea of collegiality is well documented in the literature. Secondly, the model assumes that many of the problems college instructors encounter in the classroom can be resolved if faculty members change their behaviors in positive ways and that these changes must come from within the instructor. Classroom observation is necessary because often instructors are unaware of many teaching and learning behaviors that occur. Systematic observation does not automatically improve instruction; however, the observations can be a valuable method for increasing faculty awareness of both effective and ineffective instructional practices. Thirdly, it is also important to the model that peer

mentors can present the observation results to each other in a way that will allow each faculty member to accept them as valid, to internalize them, and to use them to identify needed changes in as risk free atmosphere as possible. Finally, the model posits that changing teaching behavior is a function of social interaction and is best done as a group effort which must be given perceivable prestige or tangible reward by college and university administrators who must actively locate and allocate the necessary resources to support faculty development.

PROCEDURE

The Subjects for this study were twelve tenured faculty members from a small, conservative midwestern liberal arts college who were part of the college outreach program which involved teaching classes of students whose membership was primarily Hispanic and Black. For most Subjects, the population of students was very different from their usual classes which had been primarily white, male, and of a traditional age.

All Subjects volunteered for the study and expressed a desire to work with these non-traditional classes. Most of the classes were taught in factory or community settings away from the college, but all classes were considered resident credit classes and led to a baccalaureate degree. All participants were given release time and were paid for their participation in the project. Because 92 per cent of the college faculty are male, all of the Subjects were male.

As a first step in the training, all twelve Subjects attended a three-day conference on diversity in education held at a university in a major urban setting. The initial on-campus training began with four introductory sessions led by the Project Director in which 1) the

model for educational change was introduced; 2) the changing nature of the student body at the college was discussed in terms of the changes in age and culture diversity of the population; 3)literature and video tapes on diversity and discrimination were discussed; 4) specific classroom observational techniques were taught; and 5) literature dealing with specific techniques for improving classroom teaching was discussed.

The model for the improvement of instruction assumes that many of the problems professors encounter in classrooms can be resolved if professors can change behavior in positive ways. Because many professors are often unaware of specific teaching and learning behaviors that occur, the model proposes that increased awareness of teaching and learning behaviors in the classroom can help professors recognize needed changes. The model further assumes that teaching and learning behaviors can be revealed to the teacher through systematic observation. Thus peers were encouraged to recognize specific classroom behaviors by doing careful classroom observations of professor and student behaviors. Subjects were taught two relatively simple but efficient systems for classroom observation. One system monitored certain teacher behaviors (based on timed recordings of teacher behavior), and the other was a simplified system which was a modification of a system for monitoring certain student behaviors.

After the initial training, the group was divided into six dyads who would work closely with each other. Subjects were allowed to choose their own partners. During the group meetings ideas found in the work by Hilliard (1989) and Brophy and Good (1986) were used to talk about specific classroom behaviors of students and teachers. Ideas concerning questioning strategies, discussion strategies, student mediating of ideas, setting of

expectations, lesson pacing, wait times, and content densities of lessons were used to help professors analyze their strengths while teaching. Ideas about group dynamics and were also shared with the large group. Partners were then asked to use this information as they monitored their own teaching styles and practices in order to develop specific goals for the improvement of instruction in their own classrooms.

At the beginning of the observation process, Subjects chose specific classes to be video taped. Student workers operated the cameras in the classrooms. These tapes were used to help the dyads discuss specific classroom behaviors. At first dyads practiced observational techniques while watching the tapes--later most of the classroom observations were done without the use of video tapes because they were found to be intrusive.

After the initial goals for the improvement of instruction were established, the peer dyads were encouraged to structure many classrooms observations around their specific instructional goals. Observations and video tapes were used to help the dyads discuss specific classroom behaviors. Peers visited one another's classes for at least one hour per week. Peers met together once each week to discuss instruction observations and strategies for improvement.

The Project Director met with each of the six peer dyads for 30 minutes every two weeks. The entire group also met every two weeks for two hours during the semester to discuss project goals and implementation. Strategies which had been found successful when dealing with the diversified classes were shared with the entire group. Specific video tapes of classroom activities were shown and discussed by the entire group. A literature review was also part of these group meetings.

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Peer dyads were also asked to build a portfolio of classroom observations and exhibits to show their progress in mastering a greater variety of instructional methods geared for diverse populations. Subjects were also asked to audio tape some of their interaction sessions. The focus of these exhibits was to be the use of specific instructional strategies suggested in the literature regarding instruction for different populations, i.e., Hispanic, Black, adult, and senior learners. Because many of the students in the adult program were Hispanic, specific instructional strategies were designed for this population. Each Subject was also asked to keep a personal diary of significant events in the project.

A pre-test and a post-test (Survey of Cultural Attitudes, 1991) was given to all Subjects. This survey consisted of 15 items dealing with specific attitudes toward teaching non-traditional student populations. Subjects reacted on a 5 point Likert scale.

RESULTS AND EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Not surprisingly, the pre-and post-test of attitudes did show a significant positive in the attitudes of instructors toward diverse student populations. The twelve Subjects were significantly more positive about their ability to teach non-traditional student populations at the end of the semester than at the beginning and also more positive that high expectations could be set and gained for non-traditional student populations.

However, more important attitudinal information was obtained from the personal reflection sheets, taped conversations, and portfolio reports from the Professors. The Subjects were able to delineate specific changes in their behavior (i.e., more wait time, more use of classroom examples from all communities, an appreciation of the life experiences of

the scholars, etc.) which resulted in more classroom participation by all students. The portfolio of video tapes which the professors kept showed an increasing use of a variety of teaching techniques as the semester increased.

One procedure found to be effective when dealing with minority students was described as "separating the wheat from the chaff" (Dempster, 1993). Many of the professors were accustomed to assigning long reading assignments with little direction and expected students to discern what was important. When professors were asked to become more explicit as to important learning outcomes, the reading assignments became more focused and learning outcomes became more positive.

In a related way, professors were asked to think very clearly about the instructional aims for each class period. When professors found that they had clearly delineated instructional goals, they were amazed at the improved learning of the students in the classes. Often what education experts take for granted as part of good lesson planning is missed in liberal arts classes. Thus goal setting for daily and weekly units became part of much preparation for instruction.

Another focus of some of the curriculum sessions was the review of current research which recognizes that students do not merely passively receive or copy input from teachers, but instead actively mediate it by trying to make sense of it and to relate it to what they already know. In applying this to their classroom situations, professors worked diligently at using classroom examples which would be links to preexisting knowledge and beliefs anchored in the concrete experiences of their students. Since some of the classes were actually taught in factories in classrooms adjacent to the assembly lines, the faculty members

took factory tours, discussed work conditions with workers and tried to find classroom examples which would be more closely related with the work or home environs of their students. Often professors found that work experiences gave students a greater understanding of many of the concepts which they were trying to cover in classes such as economics, ethics, computers, and mathematics. In one portfolio statement a professor wrote "In trying to reshape my examples of subject content into new contexts more familiar to my students, I realized how narrow and confining my examples had previously been. Merely rethinking of specific illustrations for some of the points I had previously taught, showed me the narrowness of my approach to my own discipline."

Another often used technique was the "Two Minute Summary" in which students were asked to write a short summary of what they had learned in the class sessions. Professors felt that they found that this tool helped them realize when their style of teaching had kept students from learning what they had wished them to learn or conversely helped them realize when they had been successful.

A prevalent part of the discussions between the dyads and in the general sessions especially at the beginning of the project centered around standards. Professors were genuinely afraid that the standards of the institution would be compromised by the admission of these new students. As the semester progressed professors realized that some of the writing skills of the new students were not as well developed as some of the traditional students. Students were encouraged to use the writing laboratory available for all students. Professors also gave shorter and more focused writing assignments at the beginning of the semester, paid more attention to those students who needed help with writing skills, and

referred them to the writing clinic. Professors also found to their surprise that some of the non-traditional students had excellent writing skills or could compensate with excellent verbal skills. By the end of the semester, some of the concerns about maintaining standards were not heard as often or with as much fervor as they had been at the beginning of the project. However, the concern about maintaining quality standards was still heard to some extent throughout the project.

Many of the discussion sessions were filled with suggestions for using more audio visual aids and video tapes which were relevant to the working lives of many of the students. Professors found many audio visual aids which they could use in their classes. Many of these aids were not new; it was simply that previously professors had not taken the time to find these instructional aids.

Another subject often discussed in the group meetings and on the reflection sheets was the use of questioning techniques to elicit discussion from more hesitant students. Several professors, especially those who taught ethics, humanities, and religion classes, had often used a somewhat combative debate-centered classroom discussion style. These professors found that classroom discussion was enhanced in the non traditional classes when they softened their classroom demeanor and gave students more opportunity to talk in a less debate-like or confrontational style. Professors were often amazed at the depth of the discussion which could be generated when they were more patient and less threatening.

Professors also reported that the focused, careful observations of their classes helped them to pinpoint specific flaws in teaching that might always have been difficult areas but were accentuated when they began teaching more diverse classes. One professor's folio

commented often on the idea that while his clipped, fast manner of speaking had never been an asset, it became a real detriment to students who had more limited language skills than others. Making a definite effort to improve his speech patterns helped him in all of his classes rather than just in those classes found in the workplace.

Another noticeable attitude change demonstrated in the portfolios was the willingness of the Subjects to become more forthright as they discussed their teaching goals and problems with others. At the beginning of the project, professors had been reluctant to discuss their weaknesses in the classroom, the constant encouragement from their peers was invaluable in helping them change. The support of colleagues throughout the program was invaluable in promoting classroom change. However, trust levels need time to develop and the process cannot be hurried nor depersonalized. If lasting change is to develop, positive human interactions must be fostered. Throughout the project, the director needed to focus on improvement and encouragement. Each dyad meeting was expected to begin with compliments about improvements in the lessons.

Along with the concern for standards, one oft-repeated lament was the lack of attention to punctuality and a perception by the professors that their non-traditional students did not take time limits or deadlines seriously. Since this seemed to be a concern felt by many of the professors, discussion based on conflict resolution was initiated in the large group sessions. Many of the professors realized that they placed a very high value on punctuality. It was suggested that they explain to their students that this was important to them, and students responded by explaining how some of the expectations seemed unfair given the realities of traffic, and other work and home responsibilities. Generally, just

becoming aware of each other's priorities and perception of the problem lessened the importance of this issue with both sides. Professors made an attempt to be more flexible and students tried to comply with deadlines in a more precise way. In this area Diamond's work (1992) which discussed the responsibility of all members of the community to discuss feelings that arise between members of the school community proved helpful.

In an overwhelming number of portfolios, the development of close interactions with students' personal lives was discussed. Learning the correct pronunciation and spelling of unfamiliar names was mentioned often as important. Professors found themselves interested in the personal goals of students, family lives, job aspirations to a degree that was unique for them. Finally, every portfolio included some photographs of classes, and in some instances photographs of families and children of students. Professors visited community centers and places of worship in which many of their students were involved. One young professor noted that many of his students were struggling with the same family problems that he himself was encountering in his own personal life.

Many of these portfolios reiterated the idea that Brophy (1992) states that to teachers, the essence of good teaching is in the arena of human relationships and that professors found that when teaching non-traditional classes this idea is even more important. Professors reported spending more time on relationship building exercises than they did in traditional classes; however they also reported that they had begun using these exercises in their traditional classes also.

The results of the study show that it is possible to change teaching behavior by using peers. However, it is imperative that peers have specific training in both strategies for

teaching in diverse classrooms and in intervention techniques if classroom behavior is to change. Specific, measurable and realistic goals based on knowledge about the cultures must also be set if change is to occur. Although each dyad set their own specific goals, many of the goals were similar among all six groups.

Much of the effectiveness of the training came from the close collegial relationships which were established between the peers and from the specific teaching behaviors they were able to identify. Probably one of the most helpful aspects for developing a trusting caring relationship was the large amount of time which the coaches spent in one another's classrooms and in individual sessions. It takes time for close, trusting relationships to develop. Sharing one's classroom failures demands an inordinate amount of trust between colleagues. Only after significant time spent together struggling with the improvement of instruction will true collegiality develop.

However, the results of this study show that it is possible to change teacher behavior by using peers, and that although the task requires concentration and diligence, peers generally found the experience very positive.

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